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Sociopolitical Empowerment of Social Work Students

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SOCIOPOLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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SOCIOPOLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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Advocacy for social justice is a tradition of the social work profession and a professional ethical mandate essential for clinical practice and the development of social policies. Research suggests that university environments are optimal for developing and enhancing empowerment among aspiring social work students. Current undergraduate and graduate level social work students were surveyed using the *Sociopolitical Empowerment Scale* to assess their perceived empowerment. As an exploratory study, the findings suggested that educational opportunities to experience political participation and memberships in student and professional organizations are potential factors that may enhance perceived empowerment. The implications of this research support continued university curriculum development that provides students with the opportunities which will promote empowerment for advocating for social justice issues.

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Introduction

The secret of getting things done is to act!
~ Dante Alighieri

Social work originated with people pursuing social and economic justice in the context of cultural oppression. The social work profession has traditionally and historically focused attention and energy towards advocating for the underprivileged, the marginalized, and the voiceless. The quest for social change and social justice is intrinsic to the social work mission (Gray, vanRooyen, Rennie, & Ghaha, 2002). Social workers have organized communities and rallied support to fight injustices and policies that seek to exploit or undermine human rights and quality of life. What would happen to the social work profession if social workers perceived their opportunities for advocacy as futile or ineffective? "Whether social workers choose to admit it, social work is political." (Domanski, 1998, p. 11). To participate in the development of social policies at all levels, empowerment is critical for the on-going political participation of social workers.

The process of social change through political participation is complex and operates on personal, local, national and global levels. Political participation has varied over the past century and is influenced by social conditions as well as leadership beliefs (Wolk, Pray, Weismiller, & Dempsey, 1996). "Patterns of political participation are influenced by the life circumstances of citizens, their psychological orientations with regards to politics, their political and legal environments, the laws and governmental regulations that affect political participation and the choices citizens make about their participation" (Conway, 2000, p. 166). For some, political action is invigorating,

challenging and rewarding, whereas others view this arena with cynicism or anxiety and prefer to refrain from any form of engagement. Social workers are particularly vulnerable to the ebb and flow of political ideology. The profession relies on public policy to establish the basis of assisting members of society and preventing oppression. If policy is driven by political ideology, rather than true human need, agencies and services can suffer from bureaucratic complications, funding problems, and risk eradication altogether. Thus, social workers must be aware of the political climate in order to effectively and ethically advocate on behalf of their clients, community, and profession. "Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully" (NASW Code of Ethics 6.04(a)).

In the process of mastering theory and direct service practice, social workers risk losing perspective of the manner in which greater social policy is developed and how it specifically impacts services. A prime example can be seen in the media coverage of national emergencies, such as the hurricane Katrina disaster in the summer of 2005. The level of devastation and tragedy spurred a national debate on infrastructure issues ranging from environmental policies to economic oppression. Yet, the litany of experts appearing in the media consisted of journalists and politicians, while representatives from the social work profession remained in the shadows. "Indeed, there is little or no social work presence in public venues, such as speaking tours, radio talk shows, television news

shows, popular magazines, newspapers editorials, op-ed pages, or other mechanisms that inform the public about welfare and public policy issues" (Karger & Hernandez, 2004, p. 51-52). In fact, the social work professionals who possess the greatest degree of expertise and direct knowledge of social conditions ought to be an essential source of public awareness with regards to the implications of policy decisions. "When social workers neglect to engage in the politics of social welfare policy, that is, in acts aimed at influencing policymakers' resource distribution decisions, the needs of the social work clients and the profession itself are left out of the policy development process" (Domanski, 1998, p. 156). Increasing the presence of social workers in the public policy arena requires that social workers engage in political activities.

Political activity must be comprehensively identified in order to be meaningful within the social work context. "To maximize their ability to promote social justice, social workers need a clear understanding of the political structure and changing political environment that provides the parameters in which social justice is enacted at the macro level" (Linhorst, 2002, p. 201). There are many theories that attempt to define political action, the predictors of participation, and participants' overall resulting sense of empowerment. Political participation is described in some instances as activities ranging from voting, campaigning for a candidate, or participating in legislative activities. To fully understand the capacity of social workers' ability to engage in the political process, consideration must be given not just to the number and type of activities in which social workers participate, but also the level in which participation is felt to be empowering and effective.

Participation in the political process is a means of promoting social change, yet research has shown that participation is meaningless unless there is university education, opportunities, and empowerment to participate. Several studies have examined the political participation within the social work field. As various categories of social workers were surveyed, many of the studies found that the experience, university education on political issues, and efficacy from the activities influenced participation. Although a personal qualitative interview of research participants would yield substantial information as to why people chose to engage in or distance themselves from political activities, a quantitative examination of sociopolitical empowerment can provide an insightful snapshot of the sense of efficacy and motivation for involvement social workers experience in the political arena.

Literature Review

Identification of Political Activities

Using a survey distributed to 513 social work health care administrators, Domanski (1998) developed an operational prototype of political activities that consisted of eight categories. The most common activities identified in this study were those which would occur within the respondents' immediate social system (family, friends and colleagues) such as communication, advocacy, political donations, and voting. The activities that were least likely to be performed included attending public hearings, actively working in electoral arenas, and participating in protests or demonstrations. Domanski suggested that social workers could incorporate the operationally defined categories to develop and enhance political participation and advocacy beyond the realm

of basic case management to the broader aspects of community policy practice. Knowing the various avenues for influencing policy would allow social workers to decide how to effectively participate.

Using survey data collected in the1996 Evangelical Influence Survey, McVeigh and Smith (1999) applied Domanski's categories to evaluate political activity trends. (The Evangelical Influence Survey involved a random-digit-dialed telephone survey of 2591 Americans over the age of 17 regarding a variety of topics.) Based on Domanski's categorical model, McVeigh and Smith further simplified political participation into three types: inaction, institutional, and protest. *Inaction* referred to those who abstained completely from all forms of political participation. *Institutional* actions were similar to those activities described by Domanski that included traditional acts of voting, campaigning, and correspondence with political figures, lobbying, and participating in political discourse. The third category, *protest*, involved the active and public demonstration against policies or to promote social change. McVeigh and Smith determined that university education, involvement in politically active organizations, and involvement in religion (although to a lesser degree) were significant predictors of active political participation.

Measuring Political Activity

Since the 1950s, researchers have studied political attitudes in attempts to identify factors that influence political participation. Of particular interest is one's sense of efficacy, which is the perception of having power to affect the political system. If people think that they can act to influence policy development, and if they believe their actions

have been successful, they are said to have a greater sense of empowerment or efficacy (Morrell, 2003). In 1991, Zimmerman and Zahniser developed a measurement tool designed to quantify sociopolitical control in a manner that distinguished this empowerment from other types of control. The scale, *The Sociopolitical Control Scale* (*SPCS*), consists of 17 questions that attempt to address sociopolitical attitudes and leadership competence. The tool has been used in several studies and has proved to be a reliable measure of political empowerment and efficacy.

Morrell, in 2003, analyzed a variety of political efficacy surveys from 1992 through 2002, in an effort to simplify measures of political efficacy. According to Morrell, four questions demonstrated consistent and reliable results and are sufficient to determine one's sense of political empowerment. The questions address the sense of being qualified to participate in politics, a sense of clear understanding of political issues, a sense of competency as a public official, and a sense of being sufficiently informed of current political affairs.

Empowerment Studies Related to Political Participation

Beyond the sense of personal efficacy relating to the political arena, what are the factors that influence and predict the likelihood of participation in a political process? Such questions have been a focus of research throughout the world as well as in the United States. Itzhaky and York (2000) conducted a study of political empowerment among new and experienced community activists ($N = 156$) in two areas of Israel. They utilized the *Sociopolitical Control Scale* and two other measures, the *Bradburn Affect Balance Scale* and 15 questions from related surveys. Their findings indicated that the

more experience respondents had in community activism, the higher the respondents rated on leadership and decision making abilities. They also found that respondents increasingly identified with and felt more loyal to their community when they participated more in the sociopolitical process, Thus, in spite of political setbacks or frustrations, the continued experience of participation was a predominant predictor of and motivator that enhanced the respondents' sense of well being and purpose of service.

Social workers in South Africa (n = 197), New Zealand (n = 194), and Australia (n = 190), were the focus of the study conducted by Gray, van Rooyen, Rennie, and Gaha (2002). They examined the sense of empowerment in relation to the social and political context in which the social work respondents participated. Gray, et al., was able to identify barriers to political participation and empowerment in regards to their participants. They suggested that programs of intervention and implementation attract funding resources, while programs of research and policy development could be more difficult to support financially. Therefore, agencies and social workers inevitably focused less on macro-level political participation, and concentrated on local level activities that enhanced their clients and agency programs in order to obtain and retain funding. In areas where political activism used to be dangerous, such as in communities in South Africa, response bias could also have been a factor; i.e. untrained or reluctant practitioners might be hesitant to engage in more highly visible activism. The study did not include or describe the questions used in the research, and therefore the reliability and validity of the findings could not be determined. Nevertheless, the implications of

cultural and socioeconomic pressures have been considered as potential contributions and barriers to political empowerment.

Influences of Education on Political Participation

The effect of social work university education on social policy was a focus of research by Weiss, Cnaan, and Gal (2005). Students from two Israeli universities and from a university in Pennsylvania were surveyed, ($N = 223$), in an effort to examine cultural similarities and differences with regards to political participation. The results from each university found that as students began their social work studies, they tended to have a substantial variety of social justice preferences and beliefs. When the same students were near graduation, their beliefs and preferences were more similar with each other and more congruent among the three universities. The study suggested that university education had the potential to enhance and unify students' sense of identity and purpose regarding social justice and social responsibility.

A university environment has the potential to be the most conducive venue for developing the confidence to continue political participation after graduation. Biggerstaff (2003) examined the impact of university education on social workers' sense of political empowerment. Undergraduate and graduate social work students were surveyed, ($N = 589$), regarding their sense of commitment to the social justice mission of social work in relation to their post graduation career objectives. The findings indicated that, although respondents had diverse social values upon admission, when they graduated their values appeared to be in accordance with the social work mission of social justice. Biggerstaff also discovered that social workers who aspired to work in private sector or for-profit

careers were less concerned with social change than were social workers who planned to work in the non-profit sector. Although the students' university educational experience appeared to unify their commitment to the social justice mission, career objectives were found to be a predictor of the students' motivation to pursue social change.

University education was one predictor of efficacy in a study by Hamilton and Fauri (2001), who used a triangulated assessment that incorporated elements of the *Citizen Participation Study*, *Civic Voluntarism Model*, and the *Sociopolitical Control Scale* (*SPCS*), to survey the political activity of 242 New York State social workers. They found that the respondents who predominantly participated in presidential election voting were also least inclined to testify before a federal, state or local governmental legislative body as a means of political activity. In addition to education, Hamilton and Fauri also determined that membership in a professional social work association was a predictor that increased a respondent's opportunity for political participation and sense of empowerment. Of the respondents, professional social workers employed in the state of New York, those actively involved in professional organizations scored higher on the *SPCS* than those who were members but were inactive. The inactive members of professional organizations scored higher on the *SPCS* than did social workers who were not involved in any professional organizations. Their findings further suggested that social workers would be more inclined to participate in political activities if they were educated and trained in various levels of political activity.

In relation to the impact of a university education on empowerment, Wolk, Pray, Weismiller, and Dempsey (1996) qualitatively surveyed social work practicum

coordinators ($N = 161$), with regards to effective intern placement in social justice settings. They discovered that university educators have a difficult time locating practicum experiences that will provide students with the necessary exposure and experience of participating in political processes. A primary factor that inhibited these types of practicum placements was a lack of master social work professionals who could provide the required supervision of practicum students in settings that could offer political participation opportunities. These educators also believed that many students lacked the interest for participating in this type of practicum. Another factor that emerged in this study was that most political process placements did not meet the accreditation standards necessary for even a bachelor level practicum experience, as established by the Council on Social Work Education. One respondent suggested that a conflict of interest existed when placing practicum students with a politician or political office when the student attends a public university. The researchers mentioned the concern but did not provide information to address the concern. Nevertheless, the issue appears valid and worth additional consideration.

Based on the information provided by these studies, political activities can be described as activities that range from voting, campaigning, making financial donations to support a political entity or policy, corresponding with elected officials at all levels of government, lobbying, and demonstrating or protesting. The common factors that influence social workers to participate in political action include membership in professional organizations that are politically astute, university education, personal experience, and a sense of efficacy. Several of the studies used the *Sociopolitical Control*

Scale as a means of assessing political empowerment and leadership ability, and each was able to attest to the reliability and validity of the instrument.

An additional common finding among the studies was that political participation of social workers is critical for all aspects of practice within the profession. The need for additional education and practicum activities to provide training, experience and opportunities to participate in political activities was a recommendation among these studies. In other words, sociopolitical empowerment was determined to develop from knowledge and practice rather than simply as an inherent professional expectation. Thus, universities would be prime environments for the development of students' skills relating to political activism in support of the social work mission for social justice.

The studies were limited in their efforts to identify extraneous variables that could have influenced sociopolitical empowerment and political participation, such as media influence, spiritual beliefs, societal pressures, and career successes and/or failures. Each of these factors could impact the desire and extent to which social workers may feel inclined or empowered to participate in political activities. The variety of activities that could influence policy development is extensive and would be difficult to quantify in a manner that accounts for all possibilities. Therefore, implementing a standardized and operational definition of political and community advocacy as pertaining to the social work profession and mission would help to ensure that future studies would be measuring the same concepts. Research designs that provide a control or comparison group would also help control for extraneous variables.

With the emphasis on the significance of university education and training of social work students, there is a need to evaluate the current status of sociopolitical empowerment among those who will be entering the profession, influencing future policies, and advocating for social justice. Social workers have an obligation to participate in political activity to advance social justice issues on behalf of the profession and of clients. Political involvement has been essential for influencing social policy development at local, state, and federal levels. All areas of social work practice can benefit when social workers actively influence regulations and policy administration through political channels. Empowerment is essential for promoting political participation.

Accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) require a university curriculum that offers competence-based educational opportunities to enable increased political participation within the social work field. Section 4.2 with regards to the social work education content states the following, "Programs provide content related to implementing strategies to combat discrimination, oppression, and economic deprivation and to promote social and economic justice" (Council on Social Work Education, 2001, p. 9). The CSWE further requires that, through the educational content, social work students "understand and demonstrate policy practice skills in regard to economic, political and organizational systems, and use them to influence, formulate and advocate for policy consistent with social work values" (Council on Social Work Education, 2001, p. 10). Research should, therefore, continue to identify the factors that both enhance and diminish the sense of sociopolitical empowerment among social work

students. Such knowledge could enable social work programs to increase student preparedness for pursuing the professional mission of advocating for social justice.

Statement of Purpose

Several of the research studies presented here have focused on measuring empowerment with either post-graduate social workers using the *SPCS* scale, or on social work students but without using the *SPCS* scale. Sociopolitical empowerment was found to be enhanced with those who are educated, had experience with political action, and who belonged to organizations that provided political action opportunities. The results suggested that the formal social work educational process could develop and enhance a sense of political empowerment. According to the Council on Social Work Education, students should have the experience and exposure to social justice issues through education and practicum curriculum. Students would then be more prepared to engage in political actions that influence social justice. Based on the findings of previous empowerment studies, it seems important to explore whether students' level of social work education and opportunity to experience political activity might relate to scores on the *SPCS*. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceived sociopolitical empowerment of current social work students in relation to their education, membership in organizations, and personal experiences with political participation utilizing the *SPCS* instrument.

Methodology

This study addressed the sense of sociopolitical empowerment perceived by current social work students attending public universities in the central United States.

More opportunities to experience political activities, more extensive education, and membership in professional and/or student organizations were seen as distinguishing factors that could potentially enhance perceptions of empowerment. In previous research, the *Sociopolitical Control Scale* (*SPCS*) was not utilized when assessing social work students' perceived sense of empowerment. Having no prior comparative studies in this area, this research project was designed as an exploratory study without a definitive directional hypothesis. The research design used a survey with a non-probability, purposive sample. The primary focus was the acquisition of information regarding students' perceived empowerment, as indicated with the *SPCS* instrument, in association with educational, membership, and experiential variables. More specifically, this study examined the students' *SPCS* scores, the dependent variable, with the independent variables of academic levels, the number of opportunities to learn about political participation, the self-reported level of political activity, and memberships in student and professional organizations.

Survey Design

To explore the level of sociopolitical empowerment with social work students, a web-based survey (see Appendix A) was designed for students to access through their social work school's e-mail. According to Porter and Whitcomb (2003), web-based surveys have been less expensive and have had a greater response rate than traditional mail surveys. Porter and Whitcomb further recommended that web-based surveys must be designed in a simple and inviting manner that distinguishes itself from a spam or illegitimate Internet survey. Therefore, the survey employed a web-based design that

allowed for simple navigation, clear presentation, and accessibility to each participating university school of social work.

The survey was created to be accessed on-line using the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) server as the host site. Through e-mail, (see Appendix B) participants were provided with an Internet link which connected them directly and anonymously to the survey. Each social work student was to receive an e-mail through their university e-mail list server. The e-mail explained the purpose of the survey as well as the respondents' rights with regards to participation, and IRB information was provided. The e-mail also contained contact information for this researcher if the respondent preferred to complete the survey on paper instead of the Internet.

As a direct non-probability research design, the survey instrument collected information regarding beliefs about sociopolitical empowerment, participation in student and/or professional organizations, the student's university educational status, and social work courses completed. Additionally, respondents were asked whether they intended to pursue a career in direct, for-profit services, or indirect, non-profit fields. The survey offered anonymity as names and uniquely identifying information were not requested, and the demographic information questions allowed the respondent the option of not answering if the respondent believed that the question would potentially compromise confidentiality.

Measures

The primary information that was measured in this survey was the level of perceived sociopolitical empowerment of the respondents, which was the dependent

variable. The 17-question *Sociopolitical Control Scale* (*SPCS*) developed by Zimmerman and Zahniser in 1991 was the principal measurement instrument. Within the *SPCS* measurement scale are two subscales that address Leadership Competency, and Policy Control. Eight of the *SPCS* questions are designed to measure the respondent's perceived leadership skills and abilities, while the remaining 9 questions measure the respondent's perceived efficacy with regards to political participation. Each subscale had the capacity for independent scoring and reliability determination, though Zimmerman and Zahniser did not provide comparative statistical data.

Questions recommended by Morrell's 2003 research were included as an additional empowerment measure. Two of the four questions developed by Morrell strongly resembled two questions in the *SPCS* scale. First, from Morrell's study, "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics" reflected a strong interpretive resemblance to question #2 of the *SPCS* scale, "People like me are generally well qualified to participate in the political activity and decision making in our country." The second question from Morrell, "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country" was nearly identical to question #3 of the *SPCS* scale, "I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues which confront our society." Because of the similarity of these two questions and in order to avoid redundancy, only Morrell's remaining two questions were incorporated into the present survey, and appeared as questions 5 and 12. The research design called for a separate analysis of the four Morrell questions as a second measure of the sense of

political empowerment, with two of these questions being the two that resembled the two *SPCS* questions.

According to Zimmerman and Zahniser (1991), their *SPCS* measurement tool has had reliability alpha scores that range from .75 to .78, indicating fairly good internal reliability. The measurement tool also demonstrated correlations within policy control items, alienation items, and leadership items, indicating good face and concurrent validity. Morrell, however, did not include reliability results with his research involving his recommended questions.

Other survey questions were based on the demographic and additional factors discovered within the previous studies relating to education, membership in organizations, and experience with political participation. These independent variables were examined to determine relationships associated with the scores of the *SPCS* and Morrell measurements.

The survey was piloted in February 2006 with a class of social work research students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Based on feedback from the class, the survey was modified for a more aesthetic appearance, such as font-type styling and colors attributed to spaces where respondents could type an answer. Language was changed on question 5, from asking about *community* size to *town(s) or city(s)*. In question 10, the words *If you are a graduate student* were highlighted in bold type to clarify that the question did not pertain to undergraduate students. The language in question 16 was altered to ask about a respondent's *highest* degree of participation in order to clarify the most active a respondent had been in the past year. Finally, the likert scale questions

were split into two sections, question 1 and 2, to account for a page break in the survey and to reiterate the six-point scale dynamics.

Participant Recruitment

The research targeted several central (geographically) United States universities that offered both a bachelor's and a master's degree in social work. Participants were enrolled during the spring semester of 2006. The students had to be at least 19 years of age and must have had access to a computer. There were no restrictions on gender, race or ethnicity of the respondents. Responses from freshman and sophomore students were not encouraged and were not calculated in the final analysis. This decision was made because some university programs had the restriction that undergraduate students could not enroll and declare social work as a major until they were at least a junior academically.

After being contacted by telephone regarding the research study, five university schools of social work agreed to participate once it was approved through the IRB process. These were the University of Nebraska at Omaha, University of Iowa, University of Denver, University of Kansas, and the University of Wyoming. Subsequent to IRB approval, an e-mail was sent to the social work schools' director or designee, who then disseminated (forwarded) the e-mail to the social work student body through the university mail list servers. The e-mail (see Appendix B) explained the invitation to participate in the study, the purpose of the study, and the means to access the study through a direct url link contained in the e-mail. Students were also advised of the benefits of participating in the study, the timeframe in which to complete the survey, and

contact information of the researcher for questions and comments. The e-mail served as the means of obtaining consent of the participants. IRB information and contact numbers were provided before accessing the link and within the first page of the survey. Permission of the respondent was obtained as a direct result of selecting the link to access the survey, and once again in the opening page of the survey. The primary incentives for participating included the experience of completing an on-line survey (a relatively new survey approach), the opportunity to reflect on their personal beliefs regarding political participation and social justice, and the opportunity to review the results of the study.

The survey was made available from March 20, 2006 through April 15, 2006 to the five Universities that agreed to participate in the research. Additional e-mail reminders to participate were sent through the same process 10 days into the collection timeframe, and 48 hours prior to the deadline. The survey required approximately 15 minutes to complete and submit. To avoid submission errors, respondents electronically submitted their responses and exited automatically via direct link to the UNO website.

At the completion of the survey period on April 15, 2006, the survey was deactivated and survey information was downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet. Each survey response was coded and was individualized by the date and time (to the second) of its submission. The date and time numerals allowed for the identification of possible duplicate submissions, of which only one was identified. The Excel data was transferred directly to an SPSS database for analysis.

Results

As an exploratory study, the survey gathered information from 149 social work students regarding their perceived sociopolitical empowerment. The data from the survey were analyzed through a variety of statistical measures. Descriptive results were obtained through measures of frequency distribution and central tendency and dispersion. Variances in mean *SPCS* scores were analyzed using ANOVA and t-test, while the computation of Pearson r correlation was used for tests of association for interval level data. All of the statistical tests used the .05 level for significance.

Prior to final analysis of the data, consideration was given to the method in which the Morrell (2003) questions were incorporated into the survey. The decision was made to not include the Morrell data because of the modifications made in incorporating it with the *SPCS* scale. Specifically, in order to maintain consistency with the *SPCS* scale requirements, Morrell's questions were presented with a six-point *Likert* scale, rather than Morrell's recommended five-point scale. In addition, because two of the questions were also part of the *SPCS* scale, these two scores would have been duplicated in the statistical analysis. These issues led to the determination that the Morrell items were not necessary or appropriate as an additional measure of empowerment; consequently, the Morrell data were not included in the statistical analysis.

Of the five targeted universities, there were no responses from two: the University of Wyoming and the University of Kansas. There were 69 responses from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, 52 from the University of Iowa, and 28 from the University of Denver. One duplicate survey was identified and deleted from the database which left a total of 149 valid responses. Respondents had the option of not answering any particular

question in the survey, which created gaps classified as *missing,* and which account for a variation of the sample size within the analytical summaries to follow. Some of the demographic and independent variable questions included a response option of *prefer not to answer*, which is represented as PNA hereafter.

Sample Demographics

Table 1 illustrates the composition of the survey sample. Respondents were 93% female and 91% Caucasian, and just 6% reported as Hispanic ethnicity. More respondents (43%) reported growing up in a community of 20,000 people or less, than reported growing up in any other size of community. Based on the small sample size and disproportionate demographic composition, the sample was not considered representative of the social work student population or social work population.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

Demographic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	9	6%
Female	139	93%
Race		
Caucasian	135	91%
Other	7	6%
PNA	5	3%
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino		

Yes	9	6%
No	134	90%
PNA	6	4%
Childhood Community Size		
< 20,000	64	43%
20 – 65,000	22	15%
65-250,000	11	7%
>250,000	28	19%
Multiple Communities	18	22%
PNA	6	4%
Age		
19-24	51	34%
25-32	64	43%
33+	33	22%
PNA	1	1%

Among the general demographic variables of age, gender, race, ethnicity and community size in childhood, no significant relationships were found in relation to the empowerment scores. In previous studies, these variables were also not significant in the overall findings.

SPCS and Subscale Scores

The survey produced 146 valid and complete responses for the *SPCS* and its subscale results overall (see Table 2). If a response did not contain a score for each of the 17 *SPCS* questions, that case was not included in the analysis, which accounts for the variation of *n* in the results. Questions 9 through 17 were reverse scored for calculation of the respondents' mean empowerment score. The results of the *SPCS* measurement indicate moderately high empowerment among the respondents. Scores ranged from 54 to 102, with 64 being the most frequent score ($M = 73$ $SD = 10$, $N = 146$). The developers of the *SPCS*, Zimmerman and Zahniser (1991), predict an alpha range of .75 to .78. For the study sample, the alpha = .85, indicating strong reliability.

Table 2

Sociopolitical Control Measurements

Scale and Subscale	*N*	*M (SD)*	*Mode*	*Range*	α
SPCS	146	74 (10)	64	48	.85
Leadership Competence	148	35 (6)	37	29	.74
Policy Control	147	40 (6)	40	29	.77

Within the *SPCS,* the Leadership Competency score was derived from 8 of the 17 *SPCS* questions, with a maximum subscale score of 48. This survey found that scores ranged from 19 to 48, ($M = 35$, $SD = 6$, $N = 148$). The Policy Control subscale was derived from the remaining 9 *SPCS* questions, and with a maximum subscale score of 54. This survey found the scores ranged from 25 to 54 ($M = 40$, $SD = 6$, $N = 147$). The *SPCS* and subscale measures are designed such that scores would imply a respondent's sense of

empowerment. For example, higher scores would indicate a heightened perception of empowerment. The results of this study suggest that the respondents held moderately high perceptions of empowerment within all of the *SPCS* measures.

SPCS Scores and Factors Related to Education

Of the five universities invited to participate in the survey, the three responding universities were the University of Denver (n = 28), the University of Iowa (n = 52), and the University of Nebraska at Omaha (n=66). The respondents from the University of Denver and the University of Iowa scored, on average, higher on all *SPCS* measures than did the respondents from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. ANOVA found significance in the differences among the *SPCS* scores with students from University of Denver scoring the highest, and students from the University of Nebraska at Omaha scoring the lowest (see Table 3).

Table 3

SPCS Scores Per University

University	*n*	*M (SD)*	*F*	*p*
Denver	28	77 (9)	4.02	.020
Iowa	52	76 (11)		
Nebraska at Omaha	66	72 (10)		

Within the Leadership Competency subscale of the *SPCS* scale, one response contained missing data and was not included in the sample for analysis. Out of a possible 48, scores for the University of Denver, the University of Iowa, the University of Nebraska at Omaha respectively were M = 35 (SD = 5) M = 35 (SD = 7), and M = 34 (SD

= 6). An ANOVA analysis revealed no significance in the differences among the mean scores, F (2, 147) = .80, p = .453.

The sample for the Policy Control subscale contained three responses with missing data which were not included in the analysis. Scores on this subscale could range from 9 to 54. The University of Denver and the University of Iowa scored higher than the University of Nebraska at Omaha (see Table 4). The variance in mean scores was analyzed through ANOVA and was found to be significant. The statistical significance found in comparing the University scores must be considered in the realm of sample size variation, and may not suggest a valid predictable relationship.

Table 4

Policy Control Scores Per University

University	*n*	*M (SD)*	*F*	*p*
Denver	28	42 (5)	6.50	.002
Iowa	52	41 (5)		
Nebraska at Omaha	66	38 (6)		

The respondents were asked to identify their current academic standing from the categories of Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Foundation (beginning) Graduate, and Advanced (nearly finished) Graduate levels. The academic levels were recoded into three categories: undergraduate (UG) (n = 25), foundation level graduate (FLG) (n = 45), and advanced level graduate (ALG) (n = 76). Three respondents did not answer this question, resulting in a sample size of 146. The majority of the respondents (53%)

reported they were advanced graduate students. The mean *SPCS* scores for undergraduates, foundation level graduates, and advanced level graduates revealed that the undergraduates scored higher than the graduate students, while the foundation level graduate students had the lowest scores. The variance in empowerment scores was not found to be statistically significant (See Table 5).

Table 5

SPCS Scores Per Academic Level

Level	*n*	*M (SD)*	*F*	*p*
UG	25	76 (8)	.445	.642
FLG	45	73 (10)		
ALG	76	74 (11)		

Respondents were asked which type of social work career they would pursue upon graduation. *Indirect client services* included macro level social work, community organization, and/or administration and supervision. *Direct client services* included case management and/or therapy. Respondents could also opt for a *not sure* category. The distribution of responses found that 63% ($n = 93$) respondents chose direct client service, 25% ($n = 36$) chose indirect client services, and 11% ($n = 15$) indicated they were not sure. Five respondents did not answer this question. Those choosing *direct client services* had lower mean SPCS scores than those choosing *indirect client services* and *not sure* (see Table 6). An ANOVA analysis of empowerment scores among the three

categories revealed a statistically significant variance in mean scores, with those choosing indirect client services scoring significantly higher on the empowerment measure.

Table 6

SPCS Scores Per Career Aspiration

Career	*n*	*M (SD)*	*F*	*P*
Direct	93	72 (8)	8.33	.000
Indirect	36	79 (12)		
Not Sure	15	74 (10)		

Respondents were asked to indicate where they have learned about political participation by selecting from a list of nine opportunities or sources determined from implications of previous empowerment studies. For example, having educational opportunities was cited in Biggerstaff's (2003) research as being instrumental in developing empowerment. Therefore, three of the nine opportunities reflected in this survey question included classroom experience, professors, and practicum experience. Given the option to write-in an opportunity which did not appear on the list, seven respondents added a source other than the original nine. The classroom yielded the largest percentage of respondent selection at 87%, followed by professors at 81% (see Table 7). The least selected opportunities were employment (29%) and membership in student organizations (34%). The total number of selections was summed for each respondent through the count procedure in SPSS, and then analyzed in relation to *SPCS* scores. A correlational analysis revealed that the number of selections made per respondent was not

related to their *SPCS* ($r = .05$, $p = .58$), their Leadership Competency ($r = .04$, $p = .62$), or their Policy Control ($r = .04$, $p = .66$) mean scores.

Table 7

Where Respondents Learn About Political Participation

Source	% Yes
Classroom (n = 130)	87
Professors (n = 121)	81
Publications, Media, Internet (n = 105)	71
Discussions with Others (n = 100)	67
Family/Friends (n = 81)	54
Civic/Community Activities (n = 78)	52
Practicum/Internship (n = 59)	40
Student Organizations (n = 51)	34
Employment (n = 43)	29

Note: Seven respondents added National Association of Social Workers, Church, Life, Volunteering, and Young Non-Profit Professional Listserve.

SPCS Scores and Factors Related to Personal Experience

When asked if respondents, in childhood, had family or friends involved in political activities, those who responded *Yes* ($n = 49$) scored higher on the *SPCS* measurement than those who responded *No* (see Table 8). There were no answers from

16 respondents. The scores were analyzed through an independent t-test (two-tailed) and were not found to be significant.

Table 8

SPCS Scores and Family/Friend Childhood Influence

Did you have a friend or family member involved in political activities?

	n	*M (SD)*	*t*	*p*
Yes	49	76 (11)	1.37	.17
No	84	73 (10)		

Respondents were asked if they belonged to a student social work organization. Nearly twice as many respondents reported they did not belong to a student social work organization as did belong. Those reporting affirmative membership ($n = 44$) scored higher on the *SPCS* scale (see Table 9). An independent sample t-test (two-tailed) analysis indicated relationship between *SPCS* scores and membership in student organizations was significant.

Table 9

SPCS Scores and Membership in Student Organizations

Are you currently a member of a student organization?

	n	*M (SD)*	*t*	*p*
Yes	44	78 (10)	3.29	.001
No	102	72 (10)		

Respondents were asked if they were currently a member of a professional social work or human services organization such as National Association of Social Workers. The respondents who answered *Yes* ($n = 65$), scored higher on the *SPCS* measurement than those who answered *No* ($n = 80$). An independent t-test found the difference in means scores to be significant for the *SPCS* measurement (See Table 10).

Table 10

SPCS Scores and Membership in Professional Organizations

Are you currently a member of a professional organization?

	n	*M (SD)*	*t*	*p*
Yes	65	77 (10)	3.48	.001
No	80	72 (10)		

Respondents were asked to rate their level of political participation in the past 12 months within four categories. The categories included *Inactive*, meaning they did not

participate at all, *Aware*, meaning they kept apprised of political events but did not participate in activities, and *Indirectly Active*, meaning the respondent was aware of political events and participated in activities in which involvement was not mandatory for the event. The last category, *Directly Active*, was defined as activities which specifically required the respondents' participation for the event. As illustrated in Table 11, the mean *SPCS* scores for *Indirectly Active* ($n = 80$) and *Directly Active* ($n = 22$) respondents were higher than the scores of those who reported they were *Inactive* ($n = 4$) or *Aware* ($n = 39$). An ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between the level of reported political activity and the mean *SPCS* score.

Table 11

SPCS Scores and Reported Political Involvement

Involvement	*n*	*M (SD)*	*F*	*P*
Inactive	4	66 (7)	11.45	.000
Aware	39	70 (9)		
Indirectly Active	80	74 (9)		
Directly Active	22	83 (10)		

Discussion

Previous studies of political empowerment among social workers suggested that education, experience and organizational memberships might be significant influences on participation and efficacy as reflected though empowerment measures. This study explored the perceived empowerment of social work students in relation to educational,

experiential, and membership factors. The findings reveal trends which may positively impact the understanding of political empowerment.

SPCS and Subscale Findings

Analysis of empowerment scores of the *SPCS* measurement tool revealed, overall, that the respondents' scores reflected a moderately high sense of empowerment. The scoring of the *SPCS* questions allowed for a range of 17 to 102, with a mid-point of 42.5. Higher scores imply higher perceived empowerment. The average score for this study was 74 and the lowest score was 54. These results suggest that social work students participating in this survey generally felt empowered to participate in political processes. How these scores apply to social work students in general is not known, as no other studies involving social work students and *SPSC* scores are available with which to compare.

The Leadership subscale of the *SPCS* comprised 8 of the 17 *SPCS* questions and addressed aspects of leadership roles, such as leading group discussions and having people following one's ideas. Scores on the Leadership subscale range from a minimum of 8 to a maximum of 48 points. The mean score for the respondents was 35, reflecting a relatively strong sense of leadership among the participating students. In the other *SPCS* subscale, Policy Control, scores range from a minimum of 9 to a maximum of 54. The participants in this study had a mean score of 40, which again suggests a moderately strong sense of efficacy related to political participation.

The mean *SPCS* scores were comparable to those found by Itzhaky and York (2000) who used the *SPCS* scale with their participants. The results of their study

revealed *SPCS* scores ranged from 40 to 100. The *SPCS* measurement tool has been utilized in numerous studies with valid and reliable results, and the *SPSC* scores in this study produced a strong reliability alpha. Knowing that the scores of the respondents lean towards a fairly strong sense of positive empowerment, the question remains as to what factors contribute to or take away from one's sense of empowerment.

Age, gender, race, and ethnicity were not found to be significantly related to respondents' empowerment scores. The size of community a respondent was raised in as a child was also not significantly related to empowerment scores. These variables helped to identify the population of participants involved in the research. The low response rate may be a factor for why correlations of empowerment with many of the demographic variables in this research study were not found. However, in other research, age, gender, race, marital status, and socioeconomic status were not significantly related to empowerment scores.

SPCS Scores and Factors Related to Education

Drawing from a variety of universities, one goal of the study was to obtain a substantial sample size. Since there were no responses from two of the five participating universities, the sample size was not as large as desired and was not representative of the general social work student body. Even though respondents from the University of Nebraska at Omaha had lower *SPCS* scores, the empowerment scores among the three participating universities were similar in range (each scored in the 70's of a possible 102). The University of Nebraska at Omaha comprised the largest percentage of the sample (45 %), compared with the University of Denver (20 %) and the University of

Iowa (35 %), which may have impacted the statistical variances of *SPCS* scores. With all three school averaging scores within a similar range (72-77), the findings might suggest overall consistency of instruction within the social work education curriculum. Further research would help to clarify these findings.

This study found inconclusive evidence of education as a predictor of empowerment as was indicated in research by Biggerstaff (2003), though Biggerstaff did not utilize the *SPCS* instrument to assess empowerment. Scores on the *SPCS* scale revealed that, although the undergraduate student scores were higher, the difference in scores were not statistically significant. The resulting variance in scores between undergraduate and graduate students must be considered within the realms of the small and disproportionate sample size. Also, the graduate curriculum involves the focus within areas of specialization, whereas the undergraduate curriculum is more generalized, thus graduate students may have less of a political/social justice focus. These findings merit further analysis in order and may not reflect a conclusion that can be generalized to the social work population.

An additional finding in the study by Biggerstaff (2003) was that career choices affected perceived empowerment. Therefore, it was not surprising to discover that respondents who indicated they hoped to pursue careers in indirect client services scored significantly higher on the *SPCS* empowerment measures than did respondents who planned to pursue direct client services or who were not sure. Indirect client services are typically involved in policy development, program evaluation and community advocacy, thus have a greater potential for political participation. Again, the categories had

disproportionate sample sizes and may not be indicative of empowerment among social work students and their career aspirations as a whole.

The social work students in this study who indicated they plan to pursue indirect client services appeared to have a greater perceived empowerment than those planning for direct client service careers. Education for indirect client service fields involves macro-level planning, while direct client service education is more specialized for a particular, or micro, setting. Respondents selected the classroom and professors most often as sources where they have learned about political participation, while practicum and work were of the least chosen sources. The results of this study suggest that the educational curriculum may have a positive impact on social worker's perceived empowerment, while support the continued development of practicum and experiential opportunities for social work students as a means of enhancing sociopolitical empowerment.

SPCS Scores and Factors Related to Personal Experience

Experience and opportunities are essential for the development of empowerment, as shown in the research by Wolk, Prey, Weismiller, and Dempsy (1996) and by Itzhaky and York (2000). Respondents were asked if, when growing up, they had family or friends who had been involved in civic or political activities. Nearly twice as many respondents did not have family or friends involved as did. Yet, those who did have family or friends involved had higher empowerment scores. Although the variance in mean scores was not statistically significant, the effect of family on one's sense of political empowerment merits further research.

Respondents were asked about membership in professional organizations and student service-related organizations. This study found there was a statistically significant relationship between respondents' sense of empowerment and membership in student and/or professional organizations. Nearly twice as many respondents reported not belonging to student or professional organizations as did belong. Yet, those who did belong to either a student organization or a professional organization had significantly higher empowerment scores than those who were not members. The mean *SPCS* scores for those belonging to student organizations were nearly the same as the mean *SPCS* scores for those belonging to professional organizations. Both groups also had higher mean empowerment scores on the *SPCS* scores than the overall mean *SPCS* scores in this study. The study, therefore, supported the research by Hamilton and Fauri (2001) which found higher empowerment scores among practicing social workers who were members of professional organizations. The findings suggest two possibilities: that students with a greater sense of empowerment will elect to become members of student and/or professional organizations, or membership in professional organizations enables participants to have a greater sense of political empowerment.

Respondents who reported that they were more politically active within the past 12 months had statistically significantly higher empowerment scores than those who reported themselves to be inactive. These results are similar to those found in the study by Itzhaky and York (2000) regarding civic volunteerism. They found higher perceived empowerment among the more experienced participants. Further research would be necessary to clarify whether respondents felt empowered prior to political activity, or as a

result of political activity. The information from this question also provides a basis for further exploring the inhibitions felt by those who reported themselves to be less active.

When considering the results of the membership questions and the reported level of political activity, these factors appear to be important in relation to perceived empowerment. Yet, membership in student organizations and participation in civic/community activities was found to be selected by relatively low percentages of the respondents. As these factors have shown to have a positive impact on empowerment scores, membership and civic/community opportunities appear to be opportunities that should be available and strongly promoted as effective means for enhancing sociopolitical empowerment among social work students. Schools of social work and social work professionals are avenues where civic activities and student membership information may be imparted, while social work students have the responsibility to seek opportunities for learning, and participation.

Limitations

As an exploratory study, the survey design presents limitations. As a one-time measure via survey with no control group or pre/post test capacity, the findings suggest a potential baseline measure, without the ability to determine causal relationships. Other research has employed the *SPCS* scale, but not with social work students, therefore there is no other data with which to compare these results. If practical, a longitudinal study, as was done in the research by Biggerstaff (2003) and Weiss, Cnaan, and Gal (2005), might lend more insight. Using the *SPCS* scale at the beginning of the social work student's educational process and at the end of the process would provide a quantifiable measure of

empowerment over the course of an educational program. A qualitative process, rather than quantitative, could potentially point toward and clarify specific variables as well as opportunities that would enable social work students to more fully develop their sense of political empowerment. A qualitative approach could allow respondents to attribute meaning and degree of significance they place on their experiences and education as factors empowering or impairing their political participation.

Many of the variables which were analyzed for relationship with the SPCS scores contained disproportionate samples numbers. For example, the number of undergraduate responses was just 25, which cannot be considered representative of the larger population of undergraduate students. The disproportionate number of graduate student responses to undergraduate responses prohibited valid comparisons between the two groups, though the study was able to identify interesting trends among the sample as a whole. Also, the demographic information indicated that this sample was relatively homogenous in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender, a characteristic that does not represent the social work student body, or the general population.

Because there were no responses from two universities that who had expressed interest in participating, and a low response rate from the remaining three universities, the manner in which the survey was presented and deployed must be considered a limitation. Possible problems with the electronic survey process may have been software program incompatibilities, e-mail filtering programs that screen out mass e-mails as "spam," and confusion with the process of disseminating the e-mail invitation. On-line surveys are a relatively new method of data collection; thus, the study reveals that further consideration

is needed when developing contacts and procedures for deploying electronic data collection in order to improve response rates.

A further limitation in the survey deployment process may have been the dates in which the survey was made available. March and April are typically busy academic months, with spring breaks, mid-term exams, and graduation preparation for many; finding time for completing surveys can be challenging and may have contributed to the low response rate.

Additionally, the concept behind the survey might be considered a limitation itself. If one is prone towards avoiding political participation, it may be unlikely that one would relish the idea of completing a survey about political participation. Thus, the participants in this study may have chosen to participate because political activity is at least a moderate interest in their lives. Consideration must be made in future studies to develop an approach that would broaden the appeal and encourage responses from those at all levels of political involvement.

Implications

In spite of the limits identified in this research project, several interesting trends were identified that would be valuable elements for further study. The factors that showed positive correlations with increased *SPCS* empowerment scores included memberships in student and professional organizations, and opportunities to participate directly in political activities. Having a more proportionate sample of undergraduate and graduate students might help to identify strengths and weaknesses within the social work educational curriculum. For example, with an adequate and more equal sample, if

graduate student scores reflected greater empowerment than undergraduate student scores, this would support the conclusions of previous studies that suggested continued education may enhance the sense of political empowerment. If scores reflected a lower sense of political empowerment, this may suggest that social work educational programs may need to make adjustments to enhance the training of social work students. On the other hand, if undergraduate scores are higher than graduate scores, this could suggest that continued education is not a significant enhancement of political empowerment, or it could suggest that graduate level curriculum, and possibly the specialization within graduate academic programs, may not be sufficiently supporting the social justice mission.

With the opportunities to compare results from a variety of universities, differences in scores would provide opportunities to learn from each program. The initial findings in this study suggested similar empowerment levels among the three universities. Ultimately, if the undergraduate and graduate scores are not significantly different from graduate scores, and if the scores demonstrate an overall enhanced sense of political empowerment among the students, then the university curriculum and approaches can be affirmed in their continuity and their efforts to prepare students for political participation.

Graduating social work students have an obligation to participate in political activity to advance social justice issues on behalf of the clients they will serve as well as the profession. Political involvement has been essential for influencing social policy at local, state, and federal levels. Research has supported the development of educational and experiential opportunities that enhance and enable increased political participation.

All areas of social practice can benefit when regulations and policy administration are addressed and influenced through political channels by social workers. Empowerment is essential for promoting political participation. Research should continue to identify the factors that both motivate and hinder political participation in order to fulfill the professional mission embraced by every social work professional.

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Appendix A

Section 1.01 Social Work Student Socio-Political Empowerment Survey

IRB# 087-06-EX

Dear respondent:

This survey is part of a study being conducted for a graduate thesis project. The focus of the study is to examine the perceived sociopolitical empowerment of social work students. Your feedback via this survey is extremely important to this project. Please take 10-15 minutes to complete this survey and contribute to the success of this project as well as the body of knowledge relating to the social justice mission of the profession and social work education.

The survey will be available from March 20 to April 15, 2006. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer specific questions or discontinue your participation at any time. **PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE HELD IN THE STRICTEST CONFIDENCE AND USED ONLY TO SECURE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT "Sociopolitical empowerment of social work students".** If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at lstearns@mail.unomaha.edu, or you may telephone me at (402) 981-0372. For any questions regarding your rights as participants, you may contact the Office for Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska at (402) 559-6463.

I sincerely appreciate your help!

Lori Stearns
Graduate Student, School of Social Work
University of Nebraska at Omaha

1. Please select a rating from **"1"** or **"strongly disagree"** to **"6"** or **"strongly agree"** that best describes your reaction to each statement listed below.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
There are plenty of ways for people like me to have a say in what our government does.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People like me are generally well qualified to participate in the political activity and decision making in our country.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel like I have a pretty good understandingof the important political issues which confront our society.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoy political participation because I want to have as much say in running government as possible.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think that I am as well-informed about politics and government as most people.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am often a leader in groups.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can usually organize people to get things done.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other people usually follow my ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A good many local elections aren't important enough to bother with.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Please select a rating from **"1"** or **"strongly disagree"** to **"6"** or **"strongly agree"** that best describes your reaction to each statement listed below.

	1	2	3	4	5
So many other people are active in local issues and organizations that it doesn't matter much to me whether I participate or not.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It hardly makes any difference who I vote for because whoever gets elected does whatever he/she wants to do anyway.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most public officials wouldn't listen to me no matter what I did.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like to wait and see if someone else is going to solve a problem so that I don't have to be bothered by it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would rather not try something I'm not good at.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I find it very hard to talk in front of a group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would rather someone else took over the leadership role when I'm involved in a group project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. How old were you on January 1st, 2006?

- ☐ Under 19 years
- ☐ 19 to 21 years
- ☐ 22 to 24 years
- ☐ 25 to 27 years
- ☐ 28 to 32 years
- ☐ Above 32 years
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

4. Please indicate your gender.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

5. From your birth until you graduated from high school (or age 18) how would you describe the size of the population of the town(s) or city(s) in which you lived? Please check **all** that apply.

- ☐ Less than 20,000
- ☐ Between 20,001 and 65, 000
- ☐ Between 65,001 and 250,000
- ☐ More than 250,000
- ☐ Not Sure
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

6. Please indicate your **race** by checking all applicable categories.

- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ American Indian/Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Asian Indian
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other, Please Specify: _____

7. Are you Spanish/Hispanic/Latino?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

8. Which University are you currently attending?

- ☐ University of Denver
- ☐ University of Nebraska-Omaha
- ☐ University of Wyoming
- ☐ University of Iowa
- ☐ University of Kansas
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

9. What is your current academic level?

- ☐ Freshman
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Graduate Student
- ☐ Other, Please Specify: _____

10. **If you are a graduate student**, at what point are you in your Graduate program?

- ☐ At the beginning of the foundation program (less than ½ of the foundation courses completed)
- ☐ Nearly finished with the foundation program (1/2 or more of the foundation courses completed)
- ☐ At the beginning of the advanced program (less than ½ of the advanced courses completed)
- ☐ Nearly finished with the advanced program (1/2 or more of the advanced courses completed)
- ☐ Not applicable

11. As a social work student, where have you learned about political participation? From the following list, please check **all** that apply to you.

- ☐ Practicum/Intern opportunities
- ☐ Classroom studies
- ☐ Civic or community activities
- ☐ Professors
- ☐ Student Organizations
- ☐ Discussions with other students
- ☐ Publications/Media/Internet
- ☐ Employment
- ☐ Family/Friends
- ☐ Other, Please Specify: _____

12. When you were a child, did you have a parent, close family member, or friend who participated in a civic/political organization or activity?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

13. In which of the following areas are you most interested in working after graduation?

- ☐ Direct client services (i.e. therapist, case worker, etc.)
- ☐ Indirect client services (i.e. administration, program development, etc.)
- ☐ Not sure

☐ Other, Please Specify: _____

14. Are you a member of a professional social work/human services organization such as NASW (National Association of Social Workers) or NOHS (National Organization of Human Services)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to answer

15. Are you a member of any campus/student organization (not including social organizations such as sororities/fraternities)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to answer

16. People have different levels of political participation and experience. Please select the catagory below that best describes your level of participation in the last 12 months.

☐ **Inactive**(do not follow political events or participate in political activities)

☐ **Aware**(activities where actions involve education with no direct involvement, such as discussions with friends/family, knowledge through news/internet/media, taken classes or attended workshops on political/social issues)

☐ **Indirectly Active** (activities where actions involve participation without requirement, such as voting, writing letters to the newspaper or legislature, attending public hearings, membership in organizations that are politically or civically centered.)

☐ **Directly Active** (activities where direct involvement is required – such as campaigning, testifying at public/legislative hearings, lobbying, demonstrating, etc.

☐ Prefer not to answer

Appendix B
IRB # 087-06-EX

Dear XXXX,

My name is Lori Stearns and I am a graduate social work student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha . As part of my Master?s degree, I am conducting a research study under the supervision of Dr. Jane Woody, professor in the UNO School of Social Work. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived sociopolitical empowerment of current social work students who are attending Midwest universities, and to further understand the factors that may be associated with a student?s desire and confidence to participate in political activities related to social justice issues. The study has implications for the social work profession, the ethical obligations of social justice advocacy, and for universities in terms of the educational and practicum curriculum.

With your assistance, I would like to provide your social work students with the opportunity to complete an on-line survey pertaining to socio-political empowerment. If you would please e-mail the attached letter of consent containing the survey link to your BSW and MSW students, they can have access to the survey in a manner that protects their confidentiality.

The survey will be available on-line between March 20, 2006 and April 15, 2006, and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. If a student wishes to complete a paper form of the survey, please contact me and I will mail a paper copy of the survey to the school for the student. You may also examine the survey at:
http://survey.ist.unomaha.edu/phpESP/public/survey.php?name=socialworkspe

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at lstearns@mail.unomaha.edu , or you may telephone me at (402) 981-0372. This study has received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska . For any questions regarding your students? rights as participants, you may contact the Office for Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska at (402) 559-6463. If you would like to see the final report, the results of this study will be posted on the UNO School of Social Work web site when completed.

Respectfully,

Lori Stearns
MSW Graduate Student
University of Nebraska at Omaha